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ABSTRACT

The opening statement of Senator John O. Pastore for the hearings on the Surgeon General's Report on Television and Social Behavior is presented. His first few comments are directed toward summarizing the history of the report and of the Scientific Advisory Committee, with some remarks about the selection of the Committee. The critical importance of acquiring knowledge about television effects is stressed, and the need for more research in areas outlined in the Report by the Scientific Advisory Committee, such as a clinical psychological approach, is supported. Pastore requests and encourages critical readings of the Report by the scientific community so that scientific opinion on both sides of the issue is thoroughly explored. And finally, the importance of television as a principal socializing agent for children as pointed out in the Report is suggested as an area where the television industry can take the initiative and imaginatively produce programs to upgrade the cultural environment. Pastore's statement after the hearings points out that there is a causal relation between televised violence and antisocial behavior, and requests the establishment of a violence index to measure the amount of televised violence entering American homes. (SH)

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OPENING STATEMENT
by Senator John O. Pastore
March 21, 1972
Hearings on the Surgeon General's Report

Today the Committee continues a task it began over three years ago, when, on March 5, 1969, I wrote to the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare requesting that he direct the Surgeon General of the United States to appoint a Committee of distinguished men and women from whatever professions and disciplines he deemed appropriate to conduct a study which would establish insofar as possible what effects, if any, violence on television has on children.

One week later, on March 12, the then Surgeon General, Dr. William H. Stewart appeared before this Committee in open hearing and advised it he was going to appoint an expert panel to study the question in a few weeks.

On June 3, 1969 the Department of Health, Education and Welfare issued a public statement announcing the appointment of the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee. The statement listed the members of the Committee, their backgrounds and affiliations and also stated that the broadcast industry had been invited to consult in the development of this research.

Periodically, from that time until today the Committee has received in open hearing progress reports from Dr. Stewart and his successor the present Surgeon General, Dr. Steinfeld.

I was determined from the outset that the Surgeon General have absolute discretion to select his Committee and conduct the study I had requested. In fact, my initial request was specifically stated in those terms.

The absolute discretion I requested was intended to insulate him not only from Government or political pressures but pressures from any source whatsoever.

On May 7, 1970, more than one year after creation of the Surgeon General's Committee, I received a letter from Dr. James Jenkins, Chairman of the Board of Scientific Affairs of the American Psychological Association, raising certain questions about the manner in which the Surgeon General's Committee was selected.

On June 18, 1970, I received a report from the Surgeon General, Dr. Steinfeld, in which he stated, among other things, the following:

> "As a general policy, HEW does not allow industry an opportunity to review potential nominations for membership to any advisory committee, whether it affects that industry or not. However, in the past nine years there have been two exceptions to this policy, which we feel were in the public interest.
>
> These exceptions were the Surgeon General's Committee on Smoking and Health, and the Surgeon General's Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior. In each of these cases,

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"members of the affected industry were given a long list of highly qualified candidates for the Committee and were invited to indicate any doubts they might have concerning the scientific impartiality of any of the individuals on that list.

It is important to recognize that the industry did not affirmatively assist in the selection process but simply registered objections to individuals whom it felt were not impartial. In the case of the Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior, there were objections by industry to seven of the 40 names proposed.

Surgeon General William Stewart chose to select the members for service on this Advisory Committee from those candidates to whom there were no objections raised by members of the industry. This special procedure was carefully considered and used to prevent any charges that the Government was intimidating that industry or violating the Fist Amendment rights of that industry should the Surgeon General's Committee report on the research results prove highly critical of the television industry."

* * *

Without objection, the letters of Dr. Jenkins and the Surgeon General will be placed in the record of this hearing.

I believe that the offer of veto even though it involved only 7 of the 40 names compiled by the Surgeon General was most unfortunate. However, I am reassured by the Advisory Committee's discussion of this issue and their recommendations.

However we do have a Report which in the words of the Surgeon General "represent substantially more knowledge than we had two years ago."

The critical importance of every additional bit of knowledge we acquire is best put in perspective I believe by the words of an eminent psychiatrist writing on the subject of violence. He said:

"It all depends on what value we place on human life.

We do not know what small seeds may have been sown that may come to fruit in unfavorable circumstances arising much later. If the mass media seduce only one child each year to unfeeling, violent attitudes, and this child influences yearly only one other child, who in turn affects only one other, there would be in twenty years 1,048,575 violence-prone people. The mass-media audience is so large that what their apologist call very few may be actually a very large number indeed. In 1952 only the very small proportion of 0.024 percent per 100,000 died in automobile accidents. Applied to the whole population of the United States, that means that 37,794 people lost their lives."

The findings and conclusions of the Report, and the methods employed to conduct the Study itelsf, are all being thoroughly scrutinized by the scientific community; and I would hope their examination will be vigorous and take many forms.

To everyone who has read it -- layman as well as scientists -- it is apparent the Report is couched in conservative, cautious terms. After all this is a highly complex subject. Nevertheless certain basic conclusions have emerged. During the course of these hearings the Committee will hear from the Surgeon General, members of his Committee, and many of the experts who did original research for the Report. Among other things, I would hope these distinguished men and women will spell out as simply as possible for the benefit of us all what these conclusions are; and what steps the Surgeon General, the scientific community, the agencies of Government, and the broadcast industry can and should take in view of them. As I said on September 28, 1971, when the Surgeon General appeared to give the Committee a progress report ". . . I would hope that the Surgeon General in due time will come before this Committee, not with a lot of ifs and buts but will tell us in a simple language whether the broadcasters ought to be put on notice and be very, very careful in this area, because it might have an effect on certain people." In a like vein other scientific experts are also invited to come forward and express their views to the Committee. This then is one level on which I believe critical examination of the Report should proceed.

The Report specifically outlines additional areas which members of the Advisory Committee believe worthy of further study. Hopefully this matter will be explored, and various sectors of the scientific community will tell the Committee of their plans to pursue these issues as well as others which may be relevant to the central question we are seeking to answer.

And, I would hope we would not stop our examination of the Report at that point. There are many who contend that the research and studies underlying the Report support much stronger and more positive conclusions than the Surgeon General's Committee unanimously made. We should have the benefit of these views. It is only prudent to do so. Not in a spirit of acrimony or incrimination, but with the thought foremost in mind that from the give and take of controversy the best ideas will emerge.

Similarily, many highly respected members of the scientific community feel that additional methods of studying the effects of our current television fare should have been employed.

For example, one eminent psychiatrist who has done considerable work in the field has over the years urged that the problem be studied clinically by examination and observation of children, follow-up studies over a considerable period, analysis of early conditioning, study of physique, of social situation, and so forth.

The aim of clinical study is to take a longitudinal view of a child's life, and his psychological process.

In this connection, the Report of the Surgeon General's Committee noted the paucity of information about the influence of television on the psychological growth and development of young children.

According to the Report, considerable discussion within the Committee centered upon the desirability of exploring the hypothesis that television is a factor in early childhood experience that substantially shapes the aggressive potentiality of most children, which may then be later influenced by the ongoing effects of violence-viewing on television.

For whatever reasons, only a small portion of the Committee's research was focused on this area.

The Surgeon General, of course, had absolute discretion to proceed as he in his expertise saw fit. I for one, as a layman, do not feel qualified to weigh the merits of this contention. But as one who is directly responsible to the American people, I believe it is incumbent upon me to see that scientific opinion on both sides of the issue is thoroughly explored. Again not for reasons of incrimination or fault finding, but to assist the dedicated men and women who are studying this problem. It may be that there are additional methods of research which will add significantly to what we now know If so, the scientific community should be supported and encouraged in its endeavors.

Other members of the scientific community have maintained that studies should focus on television program content, not children.

In their view television is our 'electronic folklore.' As such it is, along with the family, a principal socializing agency for our children. A primary way in which we teach, inculcate, and orient them to our loyalties, standards, judgments, and values.

I believe the language of the Report eloquently recognizes the importance of television in this respect:

> "Television should seek to avoid presenting any human beings as animal-like, without conscience, or without concern for the persons they care for or who care for them, since to do so endorses and facilitates the dehumanization and destruction of the victims of that treatment. Overt or subtle cues about the victims' characteristics may reinforce in the viewer's mind images which he identifies and dislikes in himself. He then represses, renounces, and imposes them upon some dehumanized outsider. Insofar as television presents victims with which viewers cannot identify and empathize, it may encourage views to accept and endorse violence as a simplistic solution to the conflict portrayed. Insofar as television more realistically presents both human beings and human conflicts in their complex human form rather than in simplistic dehumanized form, it could well offer opportunity for more full experience as a human being. While there might be less pleasure and more conflict, more humanity would be encouraged in viewers."

It seems to me that here perhaps is an area where the television industry can take the initiative and imaginatively produce programs that will reflect these noble ideas. After all, television is a substantial part of our cultural environment; and it has the freedom to decide whether it will upgrade or pollute that environment.

Briefly, I have tried to outline what I hope will be the tenor of these hearings, and what I believe we can accomplish in the days ahead.

We all must constantly realize, however, our journey is just beginning. Long and arduous effort is still before us.

Senator Pastore's statement, March 24, 1972

When the Surgeon General appeared to deliver the report of his Committee on televised violence and its impact on children I said our journey was just beginning.

In my judgment what has taken place in the past few days is nothing less than a scientific and cultural breakthrough. For we now know there is a causal relation between televised violence and anti-social behavior which is sufficient to warrant immediate remedial action. It is this certainty which has eluded men of good will for so long.

Great as this achievement is, I also believe these hearings have underscored what I said at the outset -- long and arduous effort is still before us.

What has been accomplished will be lost if we do not proceed expeditiously and effectively. For the highest medical authority in the land has told us:

> ". . . no action in this social area is a form of action: it is an acquiescence in the continuation of the present level of televised violence entering American homes."

I am, therefore, requesting the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, the Surgeon General, and the FCC to establish a method of measuring the amount of televised violence entering American homes -- a violence index -- and for the Secretary to report to this Committee annually the results of their measurements.